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ABSTRACT

This report responds to Colorado Senate Bill 92-155 by describing the policy changes, new policies and practices, and incentives established to accomplish the legislative purpose, namely, to reduce the average length of time that undergraduate students take to complete their degrees. The report summarizes governing board reports and the actions institutions have taken to assist students toward timely degree completion. It also summarizes board responses to three particular areas of concern which the bill mentions, namely: (1) possible effects of a reduction in the number of degree programs offered; (2) potential effects of increased student costs due to extended time to completion of degrees; and (3) possible effects on core curricula. Finally, the report outlines Commission recommendations for further action. Among the recommendations are the following: (1) governing boards of higher education should define and clearly communicate to students the number of credits and the number of semesters of full-time study normally expected for completion of undergraduate degrees and identify the conditions that would justify degree programs that exceed those guidelines; (2) academic council members and Colorado Commission of Higher Education staff should identify possible incentives for students to take greater advantage of advanced placement courses and credits as a means of enhancing their academic standing when they enroll in postsecondary institutions; and (3) an increased emphasis on specific data and action plans addressing academic persistence should be included in two-year and four-year institution accountability reports to the Commission. (GLR)

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ED 367 239

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EFFORTS TO ENHANCE TIMELY COMPLETION OF BACCALAUREATE DEGREE PROGRAMS AT STATE-SUPPORTED INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

(In Compliance with Directives of SB 92-155)

January, 1994

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HE 027 205

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Executive Summary

The attached report of the Commission on Higher Education responds to Senate Bill 92-155. This report describes the policy changes, new policies and practices, and incentives established to accomplish legislative purpose. It summarizes governing board reports and the actions institutions have taken to assist students toward timely degree completion. The report also summarizes board responses to three particular areas of concern which the bill mentions. Finally, the report outlines Commission recommendations for further action.

CCHE data indicate that most undergraduate students at Colorado state-supported institutions require approximately six years to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Governing boards and institutions have taken actions to improve student advising and counseling, increase the frequency and availability of key courses, minimize credit losses from transfer, and assist non-traditional students.

Targets of the legislation are perceived institutional factors that delay graduation. They include inflated degree requirements, inadequate advising, poor scheduling of required courses, and the simple failure to clearly communicate standards and inform students that obtaining a baccalaureate degree requires a rigorous course of study. Governing boards are moving expeditiously to implement the new statewide transfer policy as a means of mitigating problems resulting from student transfers or change of majors.

Analysis of other state reports on time to degree reveals national concern over this matter and wide agreement on the nature of the problem. The Commission report itemizes the findings from other state reports into three categories: student-caused delays, institution-caused delays, and actions institutions can take.

The following recommendations are made:

(1) Two-year and four-year institutions should include in their annual accountability reports to the Commission the results of the following:

(A) A survey of undergraduate students who have stopped out or dropped out to determine whether institutional policies or practices influenced their decisions to leave. Changes in policies and practices taken to assist students to stay in school and complete their degrees in a timely manner should be reported.

(B) An examination of current academic advising programs and their re-design, as required, to preclude problems in student scheduling and course selection that may lead to extending the time-to-degree.

(C) A review of all baccalaureate programs that require more than 128 semester hours, and all associate of arts or associate of science degree programs that require more than 64 hours, for the following purposes: (1) to determine how

credit hours can be reduced, without lowering the quality of the program, so that students can complete them in four years, or two years, with a normal full load of courses; (2) to report actions taken to actually reduce requirements in degree programs exceeding 128 hours, or 64 credit hours; or (3) to fully justify programs requiring more than four years, or two-years, of full-time study. When extra time to the baccalaureate or associate degree can be fully justified, the additional credits and time required of students shall be stated in the institutional catalogs and clearly communicated to students.

(D) Institutions and governing boards should consider to use telecommunications to deliver courses on campus and/or for self-paced instruction, thereby increasing access to popular and often over-subscribed courses and eliminating one problem that leads to lengthened time-to-degree completion.

(E) Governing boards should review faculty reward policies to determine how student advising activity and the development of technology-based courses can be incorporated into the faculty reward system.

(2) Governing boards of higher education institutions should define and clearly communicate to students the number of credits and the number of semesters of full-time study normally expected for completion of undergraduate degrees and identify the conditions that would justify degree programs that exceed those guidelines. All institutional course catalogs should state the number of credits required and the length of time that each degree requires for completion.

(3) Academic Council members and CCHE staff should identify possible incentives for students to take greater advantage of advanced placement courses and credits as a means of enhancing their academic standing when they enroll in postsecondary institutions.

(4) Given the emphasis on stronger K-12 linkages, governing boards and institutions should carefully review the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act to discover innovative ways to encourage students to complete their secondary education and enroll in the State's colleges and universities.

ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENT EFFICIENCIES IN COMPLETING DEGREE PROGRAMS AT STATE-SUPPORTED INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION (In Compliance with Directives in SB 92-155)

INTRODUCTION

This report of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education responds to Senate Bill 155 enacted in the 1992 session of the General Assembly. The intent of the legislation is to enable students to complete academic degree programs in a more reasonable time period. The bill requires that students have the educational opportunities and institutional assistance that they need to complete their degree programs in a timely manner.

The statute directs the Commission to report on policy changes, new policies, and financial incentives that have been established to assure that students at state-supported institutions of higher education successfully complete their degree programs in the most efficient, effective, and productive manner. The Commission's report summarizes the governing board responses to the legislation. Governing boards are aware of the motivation for enactment of SB 155, and they report that additional steps have been taken or are being studied or planned for implementation as a result of the legislation. Each governing board report addresses specific areas relating to degree completion and discusses the three issues identified in the statute to which boards were requested to respond. Board interest in the problem is exemplified by actions of two of the governing boards. The Trustees of the State Colleges in Colorado has had the matter on its agenda and its policies do not allow new degree programs to be approved unless they can be completed in eight semesters of full time study. The University of Northern Colorado is in the process of reviewing the hours required for degrees. The State Board of Agriculture has discussed this legislation during its regular monthly meetings.

Other state coordinating or central governing agencies reported on steps they have taken in reaction to the increasing length of increasing time to degree completion. Several states provided documents detailing the ways in which the issue of time to degree has been addressed. Their reports confirm that time to degree is not merely a Colorado problem or issue. This report summarizes that information. The report also reviews the three-year degree concept, which is sometimes proposed as a solution to this problem. Finally, the report identifies areas for further actions or additional steps would be beneficial and makes appropriate recommendations.

OVERVIEW OF SB92-155

The intent of the legislation is to reduce the average length of time that undergraduate students take to complete their degrees. If institutions offer academic programs that will require more

than four years to complete, they should realistically communicate this to students. Policy reviews and new initiatives should focus on:

- Academic advising and counseling;
- Frequency and availability of courses required for degrees;
- Measures to minimize and eliminate the restrictions on transfer of credit hours between institutions and the penalties students incur when changing their majors or degree programs within an institution;
- Providing greater access to degree programs for non-traditional students.

In addition, the legislation directs governing boards and institutions to review: (1) the potentially positive effects of discontinuing degree programs; (2) the prospects for reducing educational costs as one means of reducing time to degree completion; and (3) offering core curricula to speed student progress toward graduation.

The legislation requires reports from the governing boards and the Commission to the General Assembly "on the policy changes, new policies, and financial incentives that have been established to assure that students at state-supported institutions of higher education successfully complete their degree programs in the most efficient, effective, and productive manner."

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE LEGISLATION

1. Policy Changes

As awareness of public concern has already prompted governing boards and institutions to institute changes in the ways that they conduct business and relate to students. SB92-155 has led many institutions to devote greater attention to the problem of increasing time to degree completion and develop a more student centered approach in their daily campus operations. The following sections identify policies developed by one or more higher education institution to respond to SB 92-155. The governing board summaries beginning on page 14 identify specific policy changes implemented by institutions.

Academic Advising and Counseling:

- Computerized degree audit system for tracking student progress;
- "Early alert" programs for drop-out prevention and retention advising;
- Production of handbooks for advisors;
- Training of advisors;
- Increased numbers of advisors;
- Required student advising at time of admission or for entering freshmen; advisors assigned to all students;
- Orientation programs for new students that include degree advising;

- Individualized "education plans" that outline goals and courses that students need.
- Program "contracts" between students and their advisors;
- "Peer counseling" programs;
- Advising available during evening and weekend hours;
- Coordinating advising services for consistency and accuracy among various centers;
- Special advising for students entering professional programs, such as teacher education;
- Surveying students on their advising needs and the quality of the advising they receive;
- Special orientation and advising programs for transfer students;
- On campus day care for non-traditional students;
- Inclusion of advising performance in departmental reviews of faculty;
- Periodic formal assessments of the effectiveness of advising;
- Guaranteed course availability for a four-year period for students enrolling continuously;
- A course reservation system to ensure students closed out of a course enrollment once of enrollment in that course the next semester.

Frequency and Availability of Courses:

- A four semester class schedule to facilitate planning;
- Special terms between semesters;
- Provision of self-paced courses;
- Review of the scheduling of required courses, admission requirements, and all required courses;
- Simplification of core requirements;
- Database analysis of class schedules to determine problems, then reallocation of resources;
- Broader range of choice of elective courses;
- Reassignment of faculty from low-enrollment classes to high-demand classes;
- Offering courses every two years;
- Revised academic calendar including four terms per academic year;
- New board policy requiring proposed new degree programs to ensure access to advising, adequate scheduling of courses, adequate number of faculty, and a program designed to be completed in eight semester of full-time study;

Minimizing and Eliminating the Restrictions on Transfer of Credit and Minimizing Loss of Credit from Change of Major:

- Common course numbering for community college business, basic skills, vocational courses, and associate degree elective courses;
- Transfer agreements between two-year and four-year institutions and between among four year and four year institutions;
- Board mandated automatic transfer of comparable courses from one community college to another.
- Standard curriculum for first two or three semesters or at the upper division level minimizing credit loss upon change of major;

Assistance to Non-Traditional Students:

- Offering a block of courses on a single day to accommodate non-traditional students;
- New policies on credit for prior learning; "testing out;" and standard portfolio assessment procedures;
- Courses for non-traditional students during evenings and weekends;
- Televised and correspondence courses for non-traditional students;

2. Financial Incentives

- Increasing financial aid.

OTHER RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Some of the concerns expressed in SB92-155 are also the subject of other legislation passed by the General Assembly. The Commission received statutory powers in 1985 to "establish and enforce student transfer agreements." SB 93-136 expanded this responsibility and broadened the definition of transfer. The revised statewide student transfer policy addressed the recurrent problems that bedevil students who move from one public institution to another. All four-year institutions submitted transfer plans to the Commission, which outlined the process and the timeline for developing transfer agreements. All of the institutions agreed are to accept the core curricula and lower division general education credits from other institutions in fulfillment of their own degree requirements. Four of the five four-year institutional governing boards have adopted transfer policies that establish guidelines for their institutions.

The Commission has established a ten member Transfer Advisory Council, with representatives from both four-year and two-year institutions. The new policies enable students to appeal decisions concerning their transfers to the council.

DEGREE COMPLETION IN COLORADO AND THE UNITED STATES

Colorado's public institutions are not unique in having policies and practices that inadvertently subordinate timely graduation to other goals. Other state reports indicate that similar circumstances exist elsewhere. (See the final section of this paper that lists other state reports.) Increasingly lengthy degree completion is a national problem and one which, to an extent, reflects changing societal values. Colleges and universities have the ability to change their policies and procedures and promote more timely academic advancement and completion of degree programs.

It is well documented that many Colorado students do not complete baccalaureate programs, what is commonly termed a "four-year degree," in the expected time frame. The 1992-93 Scorecard on Colorado Public Higher Education shows that more students are now requiring five years than four years to complete their undergraduate studies, and more still are requiring six years. This trend moves decidedly in the opposite direction from the public's desire.

Using the term "four-year institution" in Colorado and elsewhere reinforces the public's expectation that degrees can and normally will be completed in a four year period. A survey of freshmen by the American Council on Education and the University of California at Los Angeles found that only 9% expected to need extra time to complete their degrees. About 89 percent expected to earn at least a bachelor's degree. In Colorado, less than twenty percent of students who begin college work actually have earned a bachelor's degree four years later. This is comparable to findings in other states.

Contemporary societal changes are certainly a factor in extending the time students take to complete their studies. Students now may not feel as much pressure as their predecessors did to complete their degree in four years. Some students take courses of personal interest to "round out" their education, even though such courses may not apply toward their degree requirements. Others may work, and thereby extend the time to their degree, because the costs of higher education and the expenses of living make working a necessity. The American Council on Education has found that about half of all undergraduates nationwide work at least part-time during the period of time that they also are enrolled in higher education courses.

SB92-155 is not an attempt to reverse societal trends. Instead, it targets those factors that institutions control. Factors include increased requirements or additional courses in baccalaureate degree programs demanded by professions and their accrediting agencies. Faculty members sometimes also require more courses than needed in an effort to ensure that their graduates do not leave the institution unprepared.

Institutions may also exacerbate the time to degree problem, either from failure to acknowledge the problem, inability to devise appropriate solutions, or inadequate action to change student values and behavior. Institutions and systems of higher education might actually make the baccalaureate a four-year degree again by helping all students focus more intently on graduation.

Colorado governing boards are aware of the increasing amount of time students take to complete degrees. Most institutions know that changes are necessary. They listen to student complaints about unavailable classes and understand the need to strengthen advising and counseling, even during times of fiscal constraint. This may mean assigning greater responsibility to the faculty for student advising and concurrently changing the faculty reward structure.

GRADUATION DATA FOR COLORADO INSTITUTIONS

The following tables display graduation rates under several different scenarios. Data is shown for students entering fall 1986, fall 1987, and fall 1988. Graduation data is for those who graduated by summer 1992. Graduation rates are shown for students graduating at their initial institution ("Init") and within the Colorado public postsecondary education system.

1. System Summary

Table I summarizes rates across all twelve Colorado public colleges and universities with baccalaureate programs and first-time freshmen classes*. The first block, "All 1st-Time", shows the graduation rates for all first-time students. Although the cohort class sizes increased (from 12,810 in fall 1986 to 14,395 in fall 1988), the graduation rates for each cohort decreased. The rate after four years at the initial institution dropped from 17.7% to 15.5%. After six years, almost half (49.9%) of the fall 1986 cohort had graduated.

The second and third blocks in Table I divide the initial cohort into those who start less-than-full-time (fewer than 12 credit hours) in their first semester and those who are full-time in their first semester. The data show that most first-time freshmen start full time (11,784 full-time-compared to 1,026 part-time in fall 1986) and that there are very different graduation rates between these two groups. Students who start part time are much less likely to complete a bachelor's degree (only 18.5% in the system after six years), possibly because many of them are enrolling for purposes other than completing a degree. The remaining blocks in Table I further divide the cohorts of students who start full time. Blocks four and five look at whether or not a student has a declared major in their first fall semester. As expected, students with a declared major are more likely to complete a degree than those who are undeclared in their first semester (for example, a system graduation rate of 55.8% for those with a declared major versus 45.5% for those starting undeclared). This distinction would be expected since students with a declared major are more likely to take the courses necessary for graduation in their first two years.

The sixth block focuses on six-year cohorts of students who started full time with a declared major and who re-enrolled in the second fall after initial enrollment. These students have much higher graduation rates (70.4% system rate after six years).

Finally, the last block in Table I further breaks down the initial cohort into those who start full time with a declared major and who enroll each term for the first four years.** The graduation rates for this group are quite high, almost 86% after six years for the system.

2. All First-Time Students, By Institution

Table II illustrates a wide range of graduation rates across institutions. The differences are consistent with institutional roles and missions and diverse admission standards. The three research universities with the highest admission standards, Colorado School of Mines (CSM), Colorado State University (CSU), and University of Colorado at Boulder (UCB) have the highest graduation rates. Alternatively, the non-residential urban campuses, Mesa State College

*The University of Colorado Health Sciences Center has baccalaureate programs, but only accepts transfer students who have completed their first two years of college.

**Enrolled each fall term is a proxy for continuous enrollment. It does not, however, keep track of students who do not enroll in the spring or who may enroll in summer terms.

(MESA), Metropolitan State College of Denver (METRO), and University of Colorado at Denver (UCD) have the lowest rates.

3. Full-Time Students, Declared Major in First Fall And Re-Enrolling in System for Four Years, By Institution

Table III corresponds to the cohorts in the last block of Table I, those students starting out full-time with declared majors who enroll for four consecutive falls after initial enrollment. This sub-cohort has relatively high graduation rates (over 66% within the system after six years). The differences between institutions in this table still correspond to the different admission tiers, with institutions in the high tier showing the highest completion rates.

Table I
System-Wide Graduation Rates

	Fall	Cohort Size	Bach at Initial Inst			Bach Anywhere in System		
			After 4	After 5	After 6	After 4	After 5	After 6
All 1st-Time								
	86	12,810	17.7	38.3	44.0	18.5	41.9	49.9
	87	14,093	16.4	36.6		17.3	40.6	
	88	14,395	15.5			16.5		
Less-Than Full-Time in First Fall								
	86	1,026	2.9	10.7	15.0	3.3	12.8	18.5
	87	1,074	3.2	10.3		3.5	11.9	
	88	983	1.8			2.1		
Full-Time in First Fall								
	86	11,784	18.9	40.6	46.5	19.9	44.4	52.7
	87	13,019	17.5	38.7		18.4	43.0	
	88	13,412	16.5			17.6		
FT in 1st Fall and Undeclared Major								
	86	3,604	15.3	32.0	38.3	16.1	35.9	45.5
	87	4,268	13.8	31.3		14.7	35.8	
	88	5,627	12.8			13.9		
FT in 1st Fall and Declared Major								
	86	8,180	20.5	44.5	50.1	21.5	48.2	55.8
	87	8,751	19.3	42.3		20.2	46.5	
	88	7,785	19.1			20.2		
FT, Declared Major in 1st Fall & Re-enrolling in 2nd Fall Term								
	86	6,002	27.6	59.3	66.4	28.1	61.7	70.4
	87	6,320	26.5	57.4		26.9	59.8	
	88	5,664	25.9			26.5		
FT, Declared Major in 1st Fall & Re-enrolling in System for Four Years								
	86	4,768	33.2	70.6	77.9	34.8	76.1	85.8
	87	5,081	31.7	68.1		33.1	74.4	
	88	4,487	31.3			33.1		

(Full-time status is defined as taking 12 or more credit hours, a student would need to take 15 hours a term for four years (8 terms) to earn 120 credit hours.)

Table II

Graduation Rates For All First-Time Students for Each Public Four-Year Institution

Inst	Fall	Cohort Size	Bach at Initial Inst			Bach Anywhere in System		
			After 4	After 5	After 6	After 4	After 5	After 6
ASC	86	372	16.4	28.5	32.0	16.9	32.8	37.6
	87	414	14.0	27.3		14.7	31.6	
	88	427	12.2			13.6		
CSM	86	308	18.8	46.8	51.3	18.8	48.4	53.6
	87	344	22.1	47.1		23.5	51.2	
	88	323	17.6			18.0		
CSU	86	2,769	18.2	46.6	53.6	19.6	51.2	59.8
	87	2,878	18.0	46.7		18.7	50.2	
	88	3,210	16.4			17.5		
FLC	86	1,042	12.2	24.8	27.2	13.5	31.7	40.0
	87	1,016	13.6	23.3		15.3	32.4	
	88	944	9.0			10.2		
MESA	86	381	5.5	18.9	23.6	6.3	22.3	28.6
	87	394	8.4	16.5		9.1	21.6	
	88	401	6.5			7.0		
METRO	86	1,429	4.6	11.8	16.7	5.0	13.9	21.3
	87	1,489	4.2	11.7		4.7	14.5	
	88	1,655	4.0			4.5		
UCB	86	3,544	30.4	57.3	63.9	31.0	59.3	67.0
	87	3,752	28.8	56.7		29.3	58.8	
	88	3,474	27.9			28.5		
UCCS	86	317	8.8	23.3	29.3	9.8	28.1	36.0
	87	347	5.5	17.0		6.6	21.3	
	88	380	6.8			9.5		
UCD	86	310	6.1	19.0	22.3	9.0	27.7	35.2
	87	408	6.4	17.9		11.5	30.4	
	88	385	9.1			12.5		
UNC	86	1,503	13.2	32.3	38.8	13.8	35.9	46.3
	87	1,826	10.4	27.3		11.0	32.7	
	88	1,811	15.0			16.8		
USC	86	486	10.7	24.5	29.6	11.7	28.6	36.4
	87	587	9.2	21.1		9.5	24.5	
	88	670	7.8			8.5		
WSC	86	349	13.8	27.2	31.5	15.2	30.9	39.3
	87	638	10.2	27.3		10.3	31.3	
	88	715	8.3			9.4		

Table III
Graduation Rates for Full-Time Students With A Declared Major In Their First Fall Who Re-Enrolled in the Higher Education System for Four Years

Inst	Fall	Cohort Size	Bach at Initial Inst			Bach Anywhere in System		
			After 4	After 5	After 6	After 4	After 5	After 6
ASC	86	127	37.8	65.4	70.9	39.4	76.4	84.3
	87	170	28.8	57.6		30.6	65.9	
	88	154	29.2			32.5		
CSM	86	112	34.8	85.7	91.1	34.8	87.5	94.6
	87	111	38.7	76.6		40.5	80.2	
	88	144	29.2			29.2		
CSU	86	1,682	28.5	70.3	78.6	30.7	76.6	86.7
	87	1,791	27.8	69.8		28.8	74.5	
	88	1,105	29.1			30.7		
FLC	86	258	30.6	57.4	61.2	33.3	70.9	79.8
	87	280	31.4	50.7		36.4	69.3	
	88	261	22.6			26.4		
MESA	86	117	17.1	50.4	58.1	18.8	59.8	72.6
	87	107	26.2	49.5		29.0	62.6	
	88	108	23.1			23.1		
METRO	86	192	16.1	46.4	57.3	17.7	50.0	66.1
	87	112	22.3	48.2		24.1	55.4	
	88	123	14.6			15.4		
UCB	86	1,410	46.2	83.2	89.0	47.0	85.7	92.6
	87	1,449	44.4	82.0		45.1	84.5	
	88	1,441	41.0			41.5		
UCCS	86	50	24.0	62.0	66.0	26.0	72.0	80.0
	87	79	15.2	49.4		17.7	62.0	
	88	74	20.3			25.7		
UCD	86	42	19.0	52.4	52.4	26.2	71.4	76.2
	87	67	17.9	40.3		31.3	65.7	
	88	71	28.2			36.6		
UNC	86	502	27.5	63.7	74.5	28.1	67.9	81.7
	87	569	22.3	57.3		23.6	66.8	
	88	614	30.5			33.9		
USC	86	173	26.0	56.1	64.2	28.3	63.6	76.9
	87	167	23.4	50.9		23.4	57.5	
	88	222	20.3			21.6		
WSC	86	103	31.1	61.2	66.0	35.0	69.9	80.6
	87	179	26.8	63.1		26.8	72.1	
	88	170	21.8			24.7		

PROPOSALS FOR A THREE-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE

The three-year degree has resurfaced recently for other than educational reasons. The primary rationale for the three-year degree is that it would be less expensive for students and taxpayers and because it would increase the capacity of higher education to deal with increasing enrollment demands. There are different methods for achieving a "three-year" degree, one of which is simply compressing a four-year degree into three years. Year-round attendance (including summer sessions) at many Colorado institutions would allow current students to graduate in three years. Ft. Lewis College organizes its calendar into three trimesters and, according the institution's 1993-94 catalog, students could complete a bachelor's degree at that institution in as little as two and two-thirds calendar years by attending all three trimesters. Yet, despite this option, only .4 percent of Ft. Lewis entering in-state freshmen complete degrees in three years. Only 13.9 percent complete degrees in four years. The majority of students, as at other Colorado institutions, complete bachelor's degrees in six years. (The largest proportion of students at Ft. Lewis College and at all Colorado colleges and universities complete bachelor's degrees in six years.) One of the most creative and extensive steps taken to facilitate degree completion is the recently reorganized academic calendar at Western State College. The WSC approach avoids intensive summer sessions which may be less academically rewarding for students. Attendance year-round at most higher education institutions, including summer sessions, has been a long-standing option enabling graduation with a baccalaureate degree in less than four years.

Reduction in degree requirements would not have to occur if institutions accepted more advanced placement credit, acknowledged credit for prior learning, allowed students to "test-out" of courses, or adopted other ways that could shorten the time-to-degree. Students also could simply be encouraged to take heavier course loads or to attend summer sessions. Another suggestion for a three-year degree is to eliminate the duplication between the final year of high school and the first year of college. The need for two different sectors of education to cooperate makes this alternative more difficult, but not impossible, to accomplish. Redesign of the bachelor's degree is the third alternative. This would require institutions to determine the material considered essential to a degree and eliminate non-essential requirements. There has never been agreement in higher education about what is essential in a bachelor's degree, however. General education courses might need to become more comprehensive and a more prescriptive degree program with fewer options also might be needed.

Arguments against a time-shortened degree are that the traditional four years are needed, not only to be sure essential material is covered, but for students to mature. Older, non-traditional students might not need time to mature, but they also may not be as prepared educationally to profit from a degree with fewer requirements. The explosion of knowledge suggests to other observers that the bachelor's degree needs to be longer, not shorter. Some private schools, particularly highly selective institutions, have initiated a three-year bachelor's degree, and some state systems are considering it. Other state systems and institutions have no interest in the idea.*

*"A Fresh Look at the Three-Year Degree," Crosstalk, Vol. 1, No. 2, October, 1993.

In Colorado, the fact that SAT and ACT scores remain comparatively static, the number of students entering colleges and universities but requiring remedial courses, and the fact that a small percentage of current full-time entering freshmen complete degrees in four years, suggest that a redesigned three-year degree may not be the best answer. Opportunities provided by institutions for well qualified students to compress their degrees may be advisable, but the first task is finding ways to ensure that more students complete four-year degrees in four years.

SUMMARY OF GOVERNING BOARD INITIATIVES TO MAXIMIZE OPPORTUNITIES AND ASSISTANCE TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS FOR TIMELY DEGREE COMPLETION

The six governing boards submitted reports to the Commission that included summaries of the ways in which their institutions either meet or are preparing to respond to SB 92-155. Reports describe institutional programs, policies, or actions taken in the following areas:

- Academic advising and counseling;
- Availability and frequency of required courses;
- Elimination or minimization of transfer restrictions and minimization of credit losses for students changing majors; and
- Assistance to non-traditional and part-time students in completing degrees.

In addition, the legislation asks for discussion of the possible effects were action taken in three areas:

- Reduction of degree programs;
- Potential effects of increased student costs;
- Implementation of core curricula as a measure for assisting students to graduate.
- Assistance to non-traditional and part-time students.

This report summarizes the points discussed in governing board responses.

1. State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education and Local District Community Colleges

The Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System has invested in a computerized degree audit system that permits the student and assigned academic adviser to quickly determine how credits earned in any given course apply toward different degrees. This

program has been pilot tested at Otero Junior College, and other colleges are planning to adopt it.

Many community colleges have strengthened their "early alert" programs to prevent dropouts by identifying and assisting students who are having academic difficulty. Another activity includes the publication of an "advisors handbook" at Colorado Mountain College that includes degree plans and checklists and a transfer guide equivalency chart for advisors' use. Regular advisor training sessions concerning degree plans also are held at Colorado Mountain College, Colorado Northwestern Community College, and Red Rocks Community College. Morgan Community College has increased the number of advisors to ensure that an advisor is available to all students. The Community College of Denver ensures that advisors are consulted by requiring students to apply for admission to all CCD programs. Pueblo Community College has mandatory orientation for all new students where topics such as degree programs, career counseling, and catalog information are discussed. Lamar Community College requires "Individual Education Plans" for all students that outline student goals and outline a four-semester course plan. The College has adopted a four-semester course schedule that has reduced variations in class schedules. Colorado Northwestern Community College offers a program agreement, or contract, between advisor and student that guarantees the student's degree program. A new "peer mentoring" program will be instituted.

The board notes that the General Assembly mandated student transfer agreements in 1986 and that has made transferring to four-year institutions from community colleges easier and more efficient. Certain academic areas, including business, have continued to be a problem, but this is being addressed.

The board has implemented a common numbering system for business transfer courses, basic skills courses, and vocational courses that apply statewide to secondary vocational programs in ten program areas. Student outcomes have been described for all of these courses. A common numbering system also has been implemented for associate degree elective courses. Transfer of similar courses in comparable programs between community colleges has been mandated by the board.

Assistance to non-traditional and part-time students, of whom there are many at community colleges, is important, and the board reports increased scheduling of required courses and the availability of advisors in evening hours to accommodate these students. There are new policies regarding credit for documented prior learning, standardized "testing-out" provisions, and standardized portfolio assessment procedures.

Colorado Mountain College has increased course availability and made courses more accessible to non-traditional students by the addition of classes on week ends, during late afternoon and evening hours, mid-day and by self-paced telecommunicated classes and the "Tuesday College," which offers a block of required courses on a single day. At Colorado Northwestern Community College, all courses necessary for completing an associate degree are offered at least once a year.

2. Trustees of the University of Northern Colorado

The university has dedicated part of its Teacher Education Center staff to advising students who are seeking teacher certification. These advisors also will link with other advising centers on campus, such as the Academic Advising Center and the Arts and Sciences Advising Center, to ensure consistent and accurate information is available.

UNC administered comprehensive questionnaires early in the spring semester of 1993 to ascertain student perceptions about the importance of various advising activities and the quality of academic advising. The university will use the results to modify the academic advising system. UNC also is developing an enhanced computerized advising system that will provide students at any point with information on the specific degree requirements that have been completed and those that remain to be completed.

The university already has policies or systems in place that respond to the concerns of the legislation (23-1-108, C.R.S.) but, as a result of the legislation, will be conducting reviews of procedures for scheduling and coordinating required courses; programs for non-traditional students, transfer students, and community college relations; admission requirements; and required courses in all majors and the currently designated list of general education courses.

3. State Board of Agriculture

All institutions under the State Board of Agriculture assign faculty advisors or require academic advising focused on completion of degree requirements. New efforts include institution-wide advising services, training of faculty advisors, simplification of core requirements, and a computerized tracking system for student programs. Ft. Lewis College is exploring ways to meet the need and demand for academic advising.

The frequency with which required courses are offered is being addressed by the institutions through analysis of course offerings and the causes of oversubscription in certain courses, and the development of an enrollment management plan to adjust course demand with availability. As a result of SB92-155, Colorado State University has initiated a data base inquiry of both general education and required major field courses to determine where scheduling problems may exist. Analysis is not complete, but suggests that general education courses and courses that service several majors have the greatest number of problems. Reallocation of resources will address those problems.

Transfer problems are minimized through transfer guides with all community colleges, special programs for transfer students, and an automated transfer process that provides transfer students with information more quickly. Potential credit loss resulting from intra-institutional transfer is dealt with by institutions on a case-by-case basis, but problems are sometimes unavoidable when students change majors late in their undergraduate experience. Non-traditional and part-time students have special orientation programs and opportunities to challenge courses or to take courses through correspondence, television, or evening programs or week-end programs. Ft.

Lewis College requires additional actions to accommodate a growing, but still small, body of non-traditional students.

4. Trustees of the Colorado School of Mines

The Colorado School of Mines advises freshmen through two different, integrated programs: the Faculty Mentor Program and the Freshman Success Seminar. The programs assist students to adjust to campus life and responsibilities, help them to solve problems and to understand requirements for degrees. CSM assigns permanent advisors to students in their second year.

CSM has added more sections of high-demand courses than the increased enrollment would seem to justify. CSM has expanded elective offerings in Liberal Arts and International Studies. Mid-level courses are now accepted for fulfillment of senior requirements. Other programs are now accepting courses from a broader range of choices to fulfill requirements. More evening classes are scheduled to resolve conflicts with daytime activities.

Transfer guides have been updated recently, and the list of courses automatically transferring (not requiring faculty review) has been increased. Relations with other four-year institutions have facilitated knowledge of other institutions' courses and facilitated transfer. Credit loss by students changing majors is minimized by the requirement that students take the same courses during their first two semesters and many of the same courses in the third semester. Courses totalling thirty credit hours are common to all students at the upper division level. CSM has recently developed a relationship with Red Rocks Community College that enables community college students to take courses at the School of Mines. Mines students are increasingly taking Red Rocks courses in the summer to transfer, as well. Acceptable course substitutions for transfer students have been liberalized, within accreditation standards.

The School of Mines has increased financial aid dramatically, thereby addressing the primary reason that students do not complete degrees at the School of Mines, namely, inadequate financial resources.

5. Trustees of the State Colleges in Colorado

Preregistration advising by either faculty or professional advisors is required at the State Colleges. The Colleges are studying ways to use peer advisors and professional advising centers, to provide training to enhance faculty advising, and to use computers to aid advising by checking for students' completion of prerequisite courses. The computer system also can identify students who may need special types of advising such as students admitted in the "window." Students at Metropolitan State College's off-campus center, Metro-South, can receive advising throughout its seven-day-per-week schedule.

Each of the Colleges carefully monitors registration to identify low enrollment classes so that faculty can be reassigned to courses with the greatest demand. Courses also are monitored to

ensure that they are offered at least every two years. The State Colleges meet the accreditation standards for frequency-of-offering. The Colleges are looking for practical ways to reduce the number of courses and programs thereby reducing proliferation of courses. Recently Mesa State College restructured its baccalaureate degree program array and Western State College has recently adopted a new academic calendar which provides classes in four terms per academic year.

Each of the colleges maintains articulation agreements specifying course equivalencies with all two-year colleges. There are individual agreements with other four-year institutions, particularly in professional programs. Examples of the latter are agreements by both Adams State College and Mesa State College with the Colorado School of Mines in engineering; and Adams State College's agreements in the area of allied health with the University of Colorado and Colorado State University, and in the field of agriculture with Colorado State University. In accordance with SB92-136, the Board of Trustees adopted a new transfer policy. The board also approved new guidelines for program approval and program review. These guidelines require program proposals to adequately address the availability of academic advising, scheduling of required courses, and a critical core of faculty to insure availability of required courses. The guidelines also require degrees to be designed so that they can be completed in no more than eight consecutive semesters of full time enrollment by students in good academic standing. All of the State Colleges require a common general education core, regardless of the students' majors. This facilitates transfer between institutions and between majors within an institution.

Non-traditional students historically have made up a large proportion of Metropolitan State College of Denver students (86 percent of the student body is over age 19). The class schedule and institutional services are organized around the needs of that clientele. Other colleges are making adjustments to facilitate degree completion by non-traditional students, such as adding required courses to evening class schedules, providing day care and having special advisors for such students.

6. Regents of the University of Colorado

CU System institutions are improving the academic advising and counseling services that the faculty and professional advising staff deliver. Students generally are assigned a faculty advisor within their major department. "Freshman Seminars" at each of the three general campuses provide not only an intellectual experience but an opportunity for close student-faculty interaction. A single resource office coordinates advising on each of the general campuses. Advisors also receive training through these central offices. Online computerized advising is available at the Boulder and Colorado Springs campuses and the Denver campus is developing such a system. The effectiveness of advising is being measured in a Boulder campus survey performed every three years. Advising performance is included in departmental program reviews and faculty scholarly activity reports.

At the Denver campus a new Division of Undergraduate Studies provides an administrative structure for student retention advising for all students in the College of Liberal Arts and

Sciences. Degree contracts are being implemented in two colleges at the Boulder campus. This guarantees the availability of required courses within a four-year timeframe.

Between and 88 and 91 percent of all courses at the three general campuses are offered at least once a year. At the Boulder campus the number of course sections in College of Arts and Sciences was increased by 9 percent from Fall 1991 to Fall 1992 and the number of students of waitlists for courses decreased by 50 percent. A course reservation system at Boulder also ensures students who have been denied a course of enrollment the next time it is offered. At the Denver campus a common pool of courses with Metropolitan State College of Denver makes a larger number of courses available.

Articulation agreements have been established with all public two-year institutions, which provide automatic transfer of core courses. Policies and procedures have been approved for determining automatic transfer of courses from other four-years institutions, as well. Students considering changing majors are assisted in determining possible credit losses through the Student Information System. Information for advisors on other school and colleges requirements also helps to assure that students will have information about the consequences of changing majors.

Both the Colorado Springs and Denver campuses offer more than 35 percent of required courses both during the day and evening hours during the academic year to accommodate working students. Progress toward a degree at the Colorado Springs campus can be accelerated by enrollment in three-week "mini-terms' offered between fall and spring semesters and between spring and summer terms. Advising offices at both Denver and Colorado Springs campuses have evening hours at least one night a week.

DISCUSSION TOPICS: EFFECTS OF REDUCTION IN DEGREE PROGRAMS, INCREASED STUDENT COSTS, AND CORE CURRICULA

Each governing board responded to the following specific points of inquiry raised in SB 92-155:

- Possible effects of a reduction in the number of degree programs offered;
- Potential effects of increased student costs, costs due to extended time to completion of degrees;
- Possible effects of core curricula.

1. Reduction in the Number of Degree Programs

The statute requests discussion of the effects, if any, on the availability of classes if the number of degree programs available at state-supported higher education institutions were reduced. Governing boards concur that a reduction in the number of degree programs would not increase the availability of classes within remaining degree programs. One possible outcome expected

is that faculty would leave for positions in other institutions. One report noted that it is impractical to retrain faculty currently teaching and conducting research in disciplines considered to be expendable so that they can teach in disciplines considered more mainstream. In addition, faculty would feel that they cannot teach in disciplines other those in which they have their training, their degrees, and experience. The terminal degree, commonly a Ph.D., is generally required for faculty positions, and it entails several years of specialized advanced graduate work.

Colorado not only could lose highly qualified faculty to institutions in other states, but a large-scale reduction in degree programs would render its postsecondary education enterprise incapable of producing well prepared graduates. Graduates might be unprepared to enter professional schools or graduate programs in most scientific and technical areas. They also might be incapable of performing many roles in business because of the lack of training and knowledge in many specialty areas or in sophisticated technical areas. Graduates of Colorado institutions could become generalists, poorly equipped to perform the many specialized and technical roles that high-tech industries require.

Elimination of degree programs in some fields would not eliminate the need for courses to be offered in those fields. In many fields, courses are required to support other degree programs, even if a degree is not offered. For example, institutions must offer mathematics to support science and engineering programs even when they do not offer a mathematics degree.

Another possible outcome of degree program reduction would be that students would transfer to one of the remaining programs or to other institutions. The demand for courses would then continue at the same level and no cost savings would occur.

Degree programs that have been eliminated generally have been those that were not strong and that did not receive a large proportion of resources. Cutting such programs did not release extensive resources for utilization by other programs. A reduction in the number of courses offered -- even in the number of courses required in the curricula of major fields of study -- may need to be considered. Other states have found that this enables more required courses to be offered, facilitating student enrollment in required courses and precluding delays in graduation to some extent.

2. Effect of Increased Educational Costs on Time to Degree

Governing boards perceive that increased costs to students would have only negative consequences and would certainly extend the length of time students require to complete degree programs. Additional financial aid would mitigate the consequences, but not entirely erase them. Students already are working more hours at jobs than ever before and, were their educational costs to increase, it is likely that they would work even more hours at jobs, reduce their course load, and extend the time-to-degree even longer. Other students are "stopping out," or taking leaves of absence for a semester or a year (or more) in order to accumulate sufficient resources to complete degree programs. For many students this is the realistic option to taking on a heavy debt burden from loans.

3. Core Curricula as a Measure for Assisting Students to Graduate

Governing boards point out that there already is a general education core curriculum and that students who complete this core are able, for the most part, to continue their baccalaureate education at most of the state's institutions without difficulty. Articulation agreements between institutions have ensured that students who wish to transfer can do so easily, and that problems can be resolved through standard procedures. Several institutions also have adopted core programs that are common across all major fields. A core with limited choices could result in less access to available courses or large classes.

If, as the legislation suggests, a single curriculum for all, or most, baccalaureate degrees were established, the consequences would be the same as those cited above for the reduction in the number of degree programs: graduates could be unprepared to secure and hold jobs in business or the professions or to enter graduate or professional schools because of their lack of sophisticated and specialized training.

OTHER STATES' FINDINGS AND INITIATIVES

Colorado is not unique in its concerns about student completion rates and the length of time that students require to complete their degrees. Many states have studied student persistence and institutional degree productivity, often noting the reasons why persistence rates are low and the time-to-degree longer than expected by both the public at large and the institutions themselves.

One report notes the complexity of the "paths students follow to achieve their bachelor's degrees," and others have cited the difficult circumstances in which many students now pursue degrees, different from those encountered by students in previous generations.

Reasons determined in other states for excessive time-to-degree can be categorized as student-caused or as institution-caused. Although not documented in governing board reports, these problems also are found in Colorado institutions. They are summarized below.

Student-Caused Delays

- Transferring from one institution to another, and the lack of understanding by students of the variation among degree requirements.
- Switching from one major (or minor) to another.
- Dropping courses.
- Part-time enrollment and/or interrupted enrollment often caused by students' working while attending.

- Participation in extra-curricular activities, cooperative education, an internship, study abroad, or an experiential learning activity.

- Inadequate advising or failure to seek advising on program planning.

- Students entering college with inadequate academic preparation.

- Inability to finance the costs of attending college.

- Intentionally delaying graduation in order to better prepare for post-graduate plans or because of not having post-graduate plans.

- No intention to earn a degree; (possibly intending only to learn a single skill).

  A Virginia study found that about half of Virginia community college students never intended to earn a degree. It also found that increasing numbers of students entering four-year institutions view their educational experience the same as those community college students, as merely an opportunity to acquire certain skills or to study material of specific interest.

Institution-Caused Delays in Graduation

- Faculties establishing specific, narrow, general education course requirements in certain majors, narrowing student choices and opportunities to enroll. The shortage of general education courses was found in one study to be the largest factor in delaying graduation.

- Not providing adequate advising.

- Scheduling of courses too infrequently; poor "sequencing" of courses that allows students to get out of sequence and their graduation delayed; and disregard for the merits of year-round attendance.

- Establishing numerous undergraduate major requirements, and inflating the hours required for a degree, so that it is impossible for students to complete both general education and major field requirements in four years.

- Removal of "price breaks" or "tuition bands" that enable students taking full course loads or overloads to have somewhat lower tuition per credit hour, a policy which discourages full-time attendance. (A Minnesota study, however, found that tuition banding did not increase full-time enrollment.)

- Complex and confusing financial aid policies that tend to encourage students to work and to attend part-time or to periodically interrupt their enrollment.

- Acceptance of inadequately prepared students who require remedial work or reduced course loads to succeed.

- Failure of the institution to strongly articulate the expectation and merits of timely degree-completion.

  Current student (or societal) attitudes and values, that have changed from earlier years may have caused students no longer to understand the value of timely degree completion or to feel pressure to complete degrees.

Actions Institutions Can Take

Other state reports also suggest specific actions that institutions can take to reduce the time-to-graduation. These include:

- Redefining "normal time to a degree." Many students, even those at 4-year institutions, do not see that the time toward a degree is important, especially those students who are not making "normal" progress.

- Providing good advising at convenient times and places; strong orientation programs, tutorials, etc. Slow progress often is caused by a poor understanding of career interests and aptitudes. Uncertainty, course exploration, and changing majors cause slow-down in degree progress. Faculty reward structures also should explicitly identify academic advising as a faculty responsibility and the quantity and quality of advising should be evaluated. Clear information should be available to students and advisors on program requirements.

  The Minnesota report states the belief that strengthening advising is the "most powerful" tool to ensure timely program completion.

- "Profiles" of students-at-risk (of dropping-out) can be developed and special programs can be developed for them. Almost all Virginia colleges provide some support services for this group.

- Providing adequate class scheduling for all majors in all disciplines. Timely offering of courses (sufficient frequency) should be ensured, and elective courses should be reduced if there are problems in offering enough required courses.

- Examining institutional policies and practices and not allowing degree requirements to be inflated.

  Bachelor's degrees often require more than 120 credit hours. Governing boards and institution should examine degree requirements and determine whether they contribute to what the faculty have decided students need to know and be able to do when they graduate from each program. Four-year institutions should determine whether hours

over 120 are really needed to accomplish their goals. Community colleges should determine whether students need more than 60 hours for an associate degree. Students may actually need extra time to complete certain degree programs and in such instances institutional catalogs should state this and give the reasons.

- Reviewing financial aid policies to ensure that they are not inadvertently encouraging students to enroll part-time or to work.

- Encouraging students to focus on degree completion and discourage students from excessive experimentation and "drift."*

- Designing a year-round calendar and facilitating year-round study.* Summer programs should be expanded until the summer is viewed by students and faculty as a third term.

- Promoting improved learning in high schools.* Academic skills most strongly determine whether students will succeed in higher education. The best way to ensure college graduation is to educate students well at the high school level. (One report notes that higher admission standards at Louisiana State University resulted in higher retention rates.) Academic skills also affect aspirations, social integration, self-confidence, etc.; characteristics that correlate with persistence.

Remedial work adds time to a degree, and remedial students often are advised to take lighter than average loads, as well, making a four-year degree impossible to complete in seem to be effective while four years. Remedial courses also may not be effective. Some states' remedial programs are effective and others' are not. A Virginia study is attempting to determine whether remedial work brings students up to the needed level, and then will track students' performance. This study will track student performance, lead to recommendations on "open admissions" policies, and possibly the establishment of minimum skill levels even for Virginia's open admissions institutions.

Remedial education in Virginia is funded only at community colleges and two senior institutions. The study concludes that the next logical step is to admit students to senior institutions only when they are fully prepared to do college work. This will send a signal, according to Virginia officials, that entry to a four-year college is not an entitlement but something that needs to be worked for.

- Maximizing individual and self-paced instruction to achieve shorter average course completion times; using technology.*

- Redesigning curricula, course schedules, and faculty assignments to assure students access to all courses necessary to a degree at the proper time and in the proper sequence.*

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*Learning Productivity: A New Imperative for American Higher Education, D. Bruce Johnstone, Chancellor, State University of New York. Studies in Public Higher Education, Number 3, April, 1993.

Technology could be used better to free courses from constraints of time and space. This is likely to be expensive, especially for start-up, and there will be faculty concerns. The Virginia Council of Higher Education recommends that its institutions examine ways in which computer-based and televised instruction can supplement traditional course offerings and ease course scheduling and availability pressures. Quality should be monitored. Software also needs to be generated. Redesigning the faculty reward system also is suggested by the Virginia Council so that faculty effort to develop software is acknowledged the same as research and scholarship.

- Revise requirements to better help students meet learning goals. The most crucial courses for a liberal education should be identified and the highest priority placed on teaching those courses. Those crucial courses should not be taught primarily by adjuncts or teaching assistants. A close personal relationship with a faculty member is a very important factor in student progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The following steps should be taken to encourage governing boards and institutions to develop policies and practices that facilitate timely degree completion.

The recommendations are:

(1) Two-year and four-year institutions should include in their annual accountability reports to the Commission the results of the following:

(A) A survey of undergraduate students who have stopped out or dropped out to determine whether institutional policies or practices influenced their decisions to leave. Changes in policies and practices taken to assist students to stay in school and complete their degrees in a timely manner should be reported.

(B) An examination of current academic advising programs and their re-design, as required, to preclude problems in student scheduling and course selection that may lead to extending the time-to-degree.

(C) A review of all baccalaureate programs that require more than 128 semester hours, and all associate of arts or associate of science degree programs that require more than 64 hours, for the following purposes: (1) to determine how credit hours can be reduced, without lowering the quality of the program, so that students can complete them in four years, or two years, with a normal full load of courses; (2) to report actions taken to actually reduce requirements in degree programs exceeding 128 hours, or 64 credit hours; or (3) to fully justify programs requiring more than four years, or two-years, of full-time study. When extra time to the baccalaureate or associate degree can be fully justified, the additional

credits and time required of students shall be stated in the institutional catalogs and clearly communicated to students.

(D) Institutions and governing boards should consider to use telecommunications to deliver courses on campus and/or for self-paced instruction, thereby increasing access to popular and often over-subscribed courses and eliminating one problem that leads to lengthened time-to-degree completion.

(E) Governing boards should review faculty reward policies to determine how student advising activity and the development of technology-based courses can be incorporated into the faculty reward system.

(2) Governing boards of higher education institutions should define and clearly communicate to students the number of credits and the number of semesters of full-time study normally expected for completion of undergraduate degrees and identify the conditions that would justify degree programs that exceed those guidelines. All institutional course catalogs should state the number of credits required and the length of time that each degree requires for completion.

(3) Academic Council members and CCHE staff should identify possible incentives for students to take greater advantage of advanced placement courses and credits as a means of enhancing their academic standing when they enroll in postsecondary institutions.

(4) Given the emphasis on stronger K-12 linkages, governing boards and institutions should carefully review the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act to discover innovative ways to encourage students to complete their secondary education and enroll in the State's colleges and universities.

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